

# Salt and Light

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Preacher: Robin Silson

[ 0 : 00 ] Our reading today is from Matthew chapter 5. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

[ 1 : 06 ] For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth. But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does them, and teaches them, will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

[ 2 : 12 ] For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, And whoever says you fool will be liable to the hell of fire.

So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, Leave your gift there before the altar and go. First you reconcile to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court. Lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

You have heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

[ 3 : 17 ] If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it's better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body is thrown into hell. But if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.

For it's better that you lose one of your members than your whole body going to hell. It was also said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery.

And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn. But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king.

And do not take an oath by your head. You cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply yes or no. Anything more than this comes from evil.

You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him neither also.

[ 4 : 32 ] And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Go to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. This is God's word. Father, we thank you for your word, the Bible.

[ 5 : 31 ] And we thank you that it is the way that you have chosen to speak to us. We thank you that you teach, that you correct, that you rebuke, and that you train in righteousness to equip us for every good work.

And we pray that you'd give us ears to hear, and hearts to listen, to understand. We know we need the help of your Spirit to do that. And so we ask that you do that for us, Lord.

That you would help us to fix our attention on what you want to say to us. And so we commit this time into your hands as we look at these words together, thinking through what it means for our lives.

We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen. So looking at verse 13, chapter 5, this morning, You are the salt of the earth.

But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world.

[ 6 : 38 ] A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand. And it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

In today's world, or the Western world, we might say, I think we might have noticed there is a bit of a crisis, with a question that seems to be haunting everybody.

And the church, unfortunately, we're not immune from this question. The question is one about identity. The question is, who am I? Or sometimes, what am I?

Or perhaps, perhaps more poignantly, who do I want to be? You might have seen the program that's been on television quite a while now.

It's called, Who Do You Think You Are? It's a good program where people try to work out who they are from looking at their family history.

[ 7 : 44 ] And they go all the way back. They see their relatives from maybe 200 or 300 years ago and find out about their character and see if it tells them anything about themselves. And it's part of the quest.

It's sort of a little picture of this question, who am I? Maybe years ago, that was an easier question to answer.

Because who you were is very much tied to your family background. If you normally, if you were the son of a butcher, say, you'd take on the family business and you'd become a butcher.

If you were a banker, same idea. Later on in life, you'd follow in his footsteps. People knew who they were. It was by who their family was.

Their path in life was sort of mapped out, if you like. We don't really feel like that anymore. We have choices to discover ourselves. But the real problem with all that is that as we get older, the choices

to discover yourself, the choices left, they sort of become less and less.

[ 8 : 53 ] The life you map out for yourself when you're 21, it never really turns out that way. And so we define ourselves by the things that, they're important to a degree, but they don't really matter.

Instead of justification by faith, it's justification by the car you own. Or it's, you see, justification is not just a Bible concept.

Justification is everywhere in the world. It's not justification by faith, but justification by the car you own, the job you have, the money you have, how well your kids are doing, just by how popular you are at school, by the degree you have.

This is how we justify ourselves before each other. And so, who we are, it becomes a question about what you've done, or what you have.

And as I said, we can bring that type of thinking, without knowing it, we can bring that type of thinking into the church, and forget how God, who God says we are, and how he's called us to live.

[ 10 : 08 ] When you become a member of the body of Christ, a follower of Jesus, we get a new identity. We get a new identity. We don't have to worry, looking for that identity.

We don't have that question of who am I. We might still ask it, but we get truth from the scriptures that tell us who we are. You're part of a new family.

God is now your heavenly father, and as part of his family, there is a way of living that he prescribes. This morning we're looking at this small, there's just a few verses in it, from a very famous part of the scriptures actually, called the Sermon on the Mount.

Anytime you see a mount mentioned in the scriptures, something big happens, so you know as soon as we read, he's going up a mountain, you think, we need a zoning on this, because throughout the story of the Bible, God always seems to choose to do things up mountains.

And like Moses in the giving of the law, up a mount, here we have Jesus, looking at what it's going to, not looking at what it's going to look like, to live as the people of God, to live as the people of God, under the new covenant.

[ 11 : 28 ] He's expressing what it's going to look like. He's saying this is the family, the kingdom values, the Jesus kingdom values, what it's going to look like, to live as part of his family. This is what we're looking at this morning.

And you'll notice, as just before, in chapter, just before in chapter 4, I think it's verse 19, he's just called the first disciples, and he says, follow me, I will make you fishers of men.

Come and follow me, he's saying. It's really all about, what a follower of Jesus is like. If we're followers of Jesus, we're part of his family, part of his kingdom, what is it going to look like, to be part of that?

What is it going to look like, to be part of Jesus' kingdom? People who have, this new kingdom identity. And there's lots of things, you could say about, as we're reading, you think, wow, Matthew chapter 5, there's a lot in there.

There's a lot in that passage. Probably too much, for us to get through, in a morning sermon, and I'd encourage you to go and, dig into that chapter, more perhaps this week.

[ 12 : 32 ] But we're just going to look at, these few verses. We're going to begin, by the two big statements, that Jesus says about his people, in these verses. Two big statements, one in verse 13, and one in verse 14.

Verse 13, you are the salt of the earth. Verse 14, you are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.

Notice, this is not, it's not kind of an optional. It doesn't say, you could be the light of the world, or you might be the salt of the earth.

It doesn't leave it as an option. It's not something that you choose, depending on which side of the bed you get upon. It's not phrased as a question, either like, hey guys, do you fancy being the salt of the earth this morning?

Or, why not try being the light of the world? It doesn't phrase it that way. No, it says it as a declarative statement about what the people of God are.

[ 13 : 39 ] You are. You are the salt of the earth, and you are the light of the world. This is what they are. And this is what we are.

We might, I think we might, struggle to believe this. We might struggle to believe this. Sometimes the things that Jesus says about his people, we find it difficult, don't we, that we know it up here, but sometimes we struggle to know it in here.

We could tell, we could probably tell someone the truth of it all, but we struggle to accept it ourselves, we struggle to believe it, that every follower of Jesus, every believer who belongs to the family of God, you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world, because you've been made into something completely new.

When you were converted, when you became a follower of Jesus, he regenerated you. He regenerated you, made you into something new. Do you remember what it says in 2 Corinthians 5? You are a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come. There is something about each of us now that is different.

[ 14 : 58 ] And Jesus is using picture language to describe what the new you is like, what God's people are like. The first picture is salt.

And I love it how Jesus, he uses pictures that we can all understand. They're sort of timeless images, aren't you? Jesus is just, what a preacher Jesus is.

He just, he doesn't use some convoluted analogy. He uses salt. Everybody, because we all know what salt's used for throughout history, there's no confusion about salt.

It flavours food and it preserves things. You know that before, as many of you will know, before we all had a fridge freezer, that's how they used to store, preserve the meat, used to throw salt on it and then put it in a larder.

At least that's what my granny used to tell me. But that's now, we don't do that anymore. But actually, as well as that, there is something else going on with him calling it salt.

[ 16 : 04 ] If you look back in the Old Testament, both the Mosaic and the Davidic covenants, they get called a covenant of salt. Because, as we've said, salt preserves food.

And as salt preserves, it makes food last, doesn't it? He calls those covenants a covenant of salt because he's saying, in the same way that salt preserves food, makes it last, God's covenant promises will last.

He'll never go back on what he's promised. He'll never go back on what he's promised. The message he's saying in the Old Testament is, my covenant promises are salty.

Just like my salt preserves, I will preserve my covenant promises forever. With all that background, and they would have known that at the time, Jesus now tells his followers, his family, your identity, you, are, the salt of the earth.

Of all the people in the world, God's, these are God's people, are the salty ones. Living differently, being distinctive, and in doing so, the suggestion, it is a radical suggestion, isn't it?

[ 17 : 21 ] The salt of the earth, that in some way, as we live distinctive lives, we preserve the earth. There is a sense in when, when we live according to the kingdom values in which Jesus sets out in this sermon.

You see, do you see, as we read on, there was all this, you have heard of all, do not murder, but I'll tell you, do this. You have heard do this, I say do this. You have heard, and we saw, anger, lust, divorce, oaths, how to live.

Don't hate your enemies, love your enemies. Even if, don't just not murder, but don't even have any anger in you. Don't just not commit adultery, but don't even look at a woman with lustful intent.

This is the way the kingdom values will be lived out. And Jesus is saying, when we live like that, we're salty because it is different, it's distinctive. And in some way, when we live like that, it acts in a preserving of the earth, preventing spiritual and moral decay within our communities and with society.

and we know, some of us might know that or remember that if we look back in history when our nation was perhaps slightly higher attendance in church, that the impact that a Christian who lives according to the kingdom values has on their communities and their villages is that that way of living becomes infectious on the surrounding community.

[ 19 : 00 ] And there is a prevention of moral decay, of spiritual decay. Morality, as the church attending population goes down, the morality doesn't come from Christian values anymore, it comes from wherever you want.

where the salt of the earth, in a sense, we're preserving it. You can imagine, imagine if that was how everyone acted.

Imagine if we all did this. You think back to that bit from verse 21 about the, what does it say? But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council. And whoever says you will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, first, be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.

If reconciliation was the norm, imagine how that would change everywhere, not just within our walls here, not just within the church on a broader level, but imagine how that would change.

[ 20 : 18 ] Society, it would spill out of our walls and be infectious. Wow, do you know those people who go to church, they just like, sometimes they do upset one another, but they just like say sorry and get along.

Isn't that wonderfully attractive? it would preserve and present that attitude. Morally, society would benefit. The life of the church would benefit as we look more and more like we belong to God's people.

The second picture Jesus uses is light. You are the light of the world. You are the light of the world. We just think, I talked earlier, when I was mentioning to the kids, talked about the sun.

You just think about the light of the sun, the speed of light from the sun is 186,000 miles per second. We mentioned God uses it to give us the daytime, sustain physical life, give us the vitamins in our body.

And it's striking here that what we have Jesus saying is you are the light of the world. Remember John chapter 8, he says, I am the light of the world. And here he's saying you are the light of the world.

[ 21 : 34 ] When you become a new creation in Christ, he's saying he puts his light in you. We're not talking physical light, we're talking spiritual light.

It's light not of your own making. He's not saying you and yourself have some kind of inner spiritual light coming out of you. He's saying Jesus is the light of the world.

It's his light that's shining out of you. You didn't switch yourself on. It's the light of the world working in you and through you by his spirit.

He has lit us up with light more powerful than any created physical light, even than we get from the sun. Isn't that astonishing?

That is true for, like I said before, that is true for everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ who follows him. You've been lit with the light of the world.

[ 22 : 40 ] In a world that is spiritually dark, that is lost in darkness, can't see where it's going, it's you, it's us, we're the light of the world, who will lead people out of darkness.

Jesus will lead them out of darkness through us because we're the ones who've been lit up. In a similar way to how salt is distinctive, light shows people where to go.

Living as part of God's new family will do that. Jesus makes us live differently. You're the salt of the earth, you're the light of the world.

And so we've thought about these two pictures to begin with, salt and light. what follows in each of these verses, verse 13, the second half of verse 13, and then in 14 to 6, Jesus, he expands on these pictures.

That's often the way that you see it in the Bible. God often uses a statement about who we are, the sort of technical word for that is, an indicative statement, and then he follows it by a command or an imperative about how we should then live.

[ 23 : 50 ] This is who you are, this is how you then should live. And the first point that he makes from the, you are the salt of the earth, is actually a warning. It's actually a warning. Just look with me in verse 13, the warning.

It's a warning to not lose your saltiness. Just look with me at the second half of verse 13. But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?

It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. The warning, don't lose your saltiness.

Don't lose your saltiness. It is quite a confusing thing for Jesus to say. He's just told his followers what they are.

You are salt and light. And then he says, you're the salt of the earth, don't you lose your saltiness.

Don't lose your saltiness. The reason that's a bit weird, I think, is because that doesn't actually happen to salt.

[ 25 : 00 ] Salt doesn't lose its taste. We know from modern science that salt has a chemical formula, sodium chloride. But here's the rub of the green. If it's not sodium chloride, it's not salt.

Can you imagine, when was the last time you put salt on your food, it would ruin your fish and chips on a Friday, wouldn't it? Imagine your fish and chips, you put a load of salt on, it tastes exactly the same, or something different.

You think, hang on a minute, I haven't put salt, if you don't do it, what if I just put on my food? Salt is salt. That's what salt is. It doesn't stop being salty.

In fact, it would go against what, remember what I said about God's covenant being called a covenant of salt? It would kind of go against that reasoning, wouldn't it? If salt could somehow become not salt.

The reason God's covenant is called a covenant of salt is to highlight that the promises, the covenant God has made to his people will last forever. His covenant will always be a salty covenant.

[ 26 : 07 ] His promises will last forever. So Jesus is actually, in a very subtle way, getting at something different. He's saying, if you're not salty, then you never were salty.

You might have looked like salt, but in fact you were something else. we've all made that mistake, or at least I have, with sugar and salt in your tea or coffee.

It's a nightmare if you're doing it for a guest. It's a nightmare if you do it for your own cup of tea. That's the other way around.

Imagine if you accidentally put sugar all over your Sunday roast. I hope you don't do that this afternoon, because presumably we know what we'd have to do if that happened. You know where the Sunday roast would go.

You'd have to put it in the bin. That's what he says, isn't it? He's warning his disciples and those who are listening, when push comes to shove, the reason somebody looks like they've lost saltiness is because they were never really salt in the first place.

[ 27 : 21 ] The meal gets thrown away. Jesus says the same. it's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out. We've got to take Jesus' warning seriously here.

It's worth taking time to think about. Now, don't get me wrong, I understand there are huge amounts of pressures on Christians, on us, in today's world.

There is pressure, isn't there, to be like everyone else. you might hear it, or you hear it at the time, maybe from family members at work, maybe your neighbour.

Why do you take it so seriously? I've heard it said to myself, you know, I really think that Christian faith should just be left to a Sunday morning kind of thing.

You just leave it, leave it there. But you really believe everything the Bible says, really. There is pressure, isn't there?

[ 28 : 25 ] There's temptation to be normal, to just fit in, toe the line, and let's face it, it's pretty easy to see why we might give in to that.

It'd be easier to toe the line, keep your head down, look like everybody else. The less people know about me outside of this social setting, tomorrow, I'll fit in.

I've got a hard enough job as it is, I don't need any more conflict, and difficulty by talking about Jesus and his church, and living in a really high bar. it might look easy to do things that way, and I understand if we feel like that, but remember what Jesus says, what he's saying here, you are the salt of the earth, and real salt doesn't lose its saltiness.

Authentic Christianity, authentic followers of Jesus, they are distinctive, and it's not a bad thing every now and then to evaluate where our Christian living does rub up against the culture, and it will.

We're all in different starting places, I get that, we're all at different levels of Christian maturity, I get that, we're all works in progress, we all have times when we know that the Lord forgives us when we make mistakes, we say sorry for the times when we don't do that.

[ 29 : 50 ] Let's just remind ourselves, remember the parable of the talents, the two who use their talents produce more, they stand out, they've done something.

What about the guy who hides his talents? What's the big issue there? He looks like everybody else. He's not working for his master, and he gets thrown out.

The other two are salty, he isn't. Jesus was salty. He didn't play the game the Pharisees wanted, called them out for it.

War to you, he says. War to you. Our lives should be distinctive. Let's move on to see what he says about the next thing, the next you are.

Verse 14, you are the light of the world. You are the light of the world. And if we look down further, in verse 16, he gives a purpose behind what he says.

[ 30 : 52 ] There is purpose in being the light of the world. verse 16, in the same way let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Another wonderful illustration from Jesus, and it actually demonstrates the absurdity of, it's quite ironic, isn't it, sort of, it almost seems a bit comic, the absurdity of doing anything different if you're the light of the world.

Because he says, verse 14, a city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

It all seems pretty obvious, it's a brilliant picture again. You think about in your own homes, the main central light that you turn on with your switch, it's in the centre of the room, isn't it, to light up all the centre of the room, off the ceiling, to light up the whole room, giving light to everyone.

The main light's not on the couch. Jesus is making his points with disciples that they're to be distinctive and not be hidden. They should let the light of Jesus shine.

[ 32 : 09 ] People should know they follow him by how they live and act and talk. Jesus lights you with his light.

spiritual light able to pierce and penetrate through spiritual darkness. More powerful and stronger than the sun, the light of life, the light of Jesus, that's who you've been lit up with.

In the same way that Jesus lights up the world, in the same way, in the same way that a city on a hill cannot be hidden, in the same way, that's what in the same way means, in the same way that you don't hide the light in the basket, in the same way, let your light shine.

This is who you are. This is who you are. And I just, I want us to think about why this is so important.

Just think about the places where you work for a moment, or in your school, or places where you meet non-Christians, the places where God has put you.

[ 33 : 24 ] God has chosen you out of everyone he could have. He could have chosen somebody else out with everyone. He's chosen you to be light in your office. Out of everyone.

When you meet people in the park, he's chosen you. It dawned on me, I was, I used to, in a former life, I used to work in London, I used to work as a nurse.

And I got, I had a great job in a, working in an infectious diseases ward. It was brilliant. But there was, I wasn't under any illusion. There was other nurses that were miles better than me, more skilled, just better at doing their job.

I wasn't at badness, I was good, I was alright, I did well at my job, but it dawned me. Why has the Lord put me in this ward? Why do you, just by chance, if you're working in an office, the person on to the left of you, and the person to the right of you, why are you sat next to them?

Is it purely coincidence? Because he could have chosen a better nurse who could probably have done a better job for me in that ward, if I'm really being honest.

[ 34 : 36 ] This tells you that there's a purpose and a reason, and it's not coincidence with where you work, or where you go to school, or who you sit next to, or where your neighbours are.

It is not a coincidence. You're the light of the world to those groups. You've been made with a purpose to shine in those places.

God wants to shine. Jesus wants to shine in his world, but he doesn't just shine, he doesn't, there's a way he's chosen to shine, and it's through his people, it's through the church.

You carry the good news of Jesus wherever you go. walking down the street, playing in the park at school, on the bus, doing your weekly shop, going to gym, playing sport, you're the light, the spiritual light.

Your heavenly father has lit you with a purpose, so that they may see your deeds and glorify your father in heaven. The good deeds you do, the distinctive way of living, alongside the explanation of the gospel, will cause people to look into the Christian faith, like moths attracted to the light.

[ 35 : 48 ] I started off with that question, didn't I? Who am I? That question that seems to haunt society.

Look at who am I? What am I? Who do I want to be? We have answers to that question. We have answers to that question.

the new creations in Christ. We belong to him. He's our father. We can speak to him. We're people of the living God.

We're in Revelation 7, when we read of the multitudes that surround the throne, they're going to be there. And he's, he says, this is who you are.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. You're within our, you're within your rights, totally within your rights to say that about, to remind yourself, to remind one another, every day, that that's who you are.

[ 36 : 57 ] We're followers of Jesus, trusting in his death, in our place. He's resurrected from the grave, and we have resurrection, new creation, life.

It's his power at work in us to light up the world. This is who we are, a new identity, a new family. Let's live as the people he's called us to be.

Let's live as the people he's called us to be. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the work that you've done in our lives.

We thank you that you've given us a new identity. We see the world and we look around and we see people lost. And we are a people who once were lost.

We didn't know who we were. We tried to find the answers, looking in every alley, every highway, trying to find out who we were.

[ 38 : 04 ] And we didn't know. We didn't have an answer. But then you opened our eyes and we saw Jesus. And you told us who we are. You gave us that new identity, a new family that would belong to you.

We're children of God, that we call on you as father. And we thank you, we praise you. It is just so magnificent, the gospel promise.

And we thank you that these statements that are true, that sometimes we even struggle to believe them about ourselves. We thank you that these are promises, these are statements about us that will never change.

And so I pray, Lord, as people who are salt, who are light, who are holy, would you help us to live as those people?

Help us to be salty and light to the world. Help us to be holy because you're holy. So we pray that you'd help us this week to take this word home, that we've meditated, that you'd ruminate in our minds and in our hearts, and that you'd change us by the power of your spirit.

[ 39 : 23 ] We ask for all this in Jesus' name. Amen.